**Toolbox Activities: Many meetings use "ground rules" so as to help all persons feel safe, ensure all persons are heard and can participate, and guide appropriate behaviors. Discuss with your Cohort Group ground rules you think do not prohibit good conversation or turn off participants and form a list of ones you feel are the most necessary. Journal what you learned.**

Our discussion of what might be considered bad ground rules didn’t actually develop a list of rules we considered bad but rather conditions that would make any of the rules nonproductive. We talked about when an inordinate amount of emphasis was placed on any one of the stated “ground rules” at the expense of the other “ground rules” would make that ground rule counterproductive. We also discussed the fact that any of the “ground rules” would be ineffective if they were not enforced. For example, if one of the ground rules was that the meetings would start and stop on time and several members of the group were late and nothing was done to address the problem the rule becomes ineffective and counterproductive to the purpose of the meeting. Another area we discussed was it is important that you only have a few important ground rules and that those rules are communicated and reviewed with all team members on a regular basis. We also think it is important that the group or the team has input into what the ground rules should be. This would help with the buy-in of the ground rules. It might be important to discuss how situations would be handled if the ground rules were not being followed. It might be different for the different ground rules. We discussed the most important thing is to have some ground rules and make sure everyone agrees to following them.

Examples of Effective Ground Rules:

Please try and keep to the meeting/training program schedule; we will not penalize the participants who arrive on time.

Everything that is said here stays here (confidentiality is important to ensure participant comfort and candor).

Please keep cell phones off, or on “vibrate” (you can make exceptions for participants who are on “crisis” duty).

Participants can participate to the degree to which they want (or not).

While it’s important for everyone to participate, it’s also important that individuals don’t over-participate.

No idea is a bad idea.

If instructions for discussions and/or activities are not clear, participants will ask for clarification.

Assume positive intent.

We have learned that it is important to bring expected behaviors into conversations in order to minimize interaction issues. Sometimes as human beings we just need to be reminded what is important and we all are working towards one common goal. We do believe it is important that all members of a working team have an active voice when creating and following stated and developed norms. It is far too easy for certain personalities to dominate a working team.